

186 inhabited the mountain caves long before the present Arabs, who
 563 are mostly farmers and fishermen, came to live in the valleys and date plantations. It is said by some (he added) that they are descendants of Sinbad, the sailor hero of the *Arabian Nights*, who was born at Zubair, near Basra, where the Euphrates joins forces with the Shatt-al-Arab river. In these mountains the fabulous Giant Roc, *rukh* in Arabic, is said to have had a lair from which he would carry gold and precious stones, as well as pearls, to his island fortress near Aden.

'It was probably nothing more than a *na'qr* (eagle),' broke in the Khan Sahib with a chuckle, but Ali would have none of this.

'No, Sahib, it was a giant bird with a spread of wings that shadowed the land for miles and struck fear into the hearts of men,' he said, uttering a '*Bismillah*' to protect himself from evil.

7 'Tush!' said the Khan Sahib. 'Then it was a *na'sir* (vulture)', and Ali, thus affronted, fell into a sulky silence and puffed away at his pipe, and we did not hear more of his stories that night.

352 The Khan Sahib began to yawn sleepily and presently asked us if
 354 we were ready to retire. He conducted us along a white-walled
 357 gallery to our sleeping quarters, a low-ceilinged room containing half a dozen charpays and a brazier of smouldering charcoal. Feeling drowsy, we undressed quickly and were soon half asleep. Outside the veranda a watchman chanted songs of praise to Allah; a pai dog bayed at the moon, and the fronded leaves of the palms whispered secrets to the night.